DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 687 PS 020 401

AUTHOR Dowd, Frances Smardo
TITLE Library Latchkey Children. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-PS-92-1
PUB DATE 92
CONTRACT RI88062012
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *After School Programs; Foreign Countries; *Latchkey Children; Librarians; *Library Role; *Library Services; Library Surveys; National Surveys; *Public Libraries; Referral; Users (Information)
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests; *Library Public Services

ABSTRACT

This digest discusses ways in which public libraries deal with latchkey children who spend their after-school hours at public libraries while their parents are at work. Research conducted in 1990 of 110 public libraries revealed that almost all libraries encountered unattended children after school hours, and that most libraries surveyed were not adversely affected by latchkey children. Nine successful or innovative programs in public libraries in the United States and Canada that address the needs of latchkey children are described. These programs often involve transportation of children from schools to the library; using retired senior volunteers; theater presentations; making available arts and crafts, games, computers and typewriters, read-along books, films, and refreshments; activities, including theater presentations, swimming, and field trips; and instruction in etiquette, survival and safety skills. Some programs offer activities designed to foster self-esteem and creativity, child care referral services for parents, and special services for children of immigrants. Recommendations for libraries include interacting with community agencies; conducting research; recruiting children as future library patrons; creating a separate area for children's use; using volunteers; and providing arts and crafts supplies. The digest is adapted from the book, "Latchkey Children in the Library and Community: Issues, Strategies, and Programs" (Oryx Press, 1991). Eight references are cited. (BC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801
(217) 333-1386

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Digest

EDO-PS-92-1

ED343687

Library Latchkey Children

Frances Smardo Dowd

Throughout the U.S. and Canada many children are spending their after-school hours at public libraries until being picked up by a working parent (Budziszewski, 1990). While public librarians have traditionally welcomed the use of library resources by children, library latchkey youth are a controversial issue among librarians because most public librarians feel that they are not trained to be caregivers; that their libraries do not have sufficient staff to provide child care; and that their facilities are not equipped or licensed to function as a substitute for child care centers (American Library Association, 1989).

Research

Results of a national study conducted by the author in 1990 revealed that almost all of the 110 large, public libraries surveyed encountered latchkey or unattended children who used the library for child care purposes after school, but that innovative strategies were being implemented to address the needs of this audience. The minority of libraries sampled were adversely affected by latchkey children in regard to legal liability (13%); medical emergencies or accidents (18%); reallocation of staff to cover the after-school hours (20%); and need for increased security measures (34%). The most frequently reported services offered by public libraries for this clientele were: information and referral regarding reliable licensed child care (63%); storyhours, clubs and other traditional library programs (51%); drop-in activity programs (such as arts and crafts and films) (47%); and volunteer opportunities for children (43%). Almost all the librarians learned about services to latchkey children from reading or on-the-job experiences, and only 20% felt ineffective in serving this clientele. Most preferred to increase their knowledge about this group by attending conferences and in-service presentations, and by communicating with other librarians who dealt with such groups (Dowd, 1991).

Successful Programs for Library Latchkey Children

- At the Fort Erie Public Library in Ontario, Canada, the Creative Afterschool Recreation and Enrichment (C.A.R.E.) project, funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and coordinated by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario, features before- and after-school activities at two library sites; transportation of children from schools to the library; nutritional snacks prepared by children; the use of pool and recreational facilities at the YMCA; and field trips to historic sites.
- Baltimore County's Public Library in Maryland operates LOCATE: Child Care Referral Service, which helps parents identify appropriate child care options and providers.
- At the Charles County Public Library in Maryland students join the Teen Scene Club and meet twice a week after school to participate in reader's theater presentations; to use sources of information on etiquette to plan and host an afternoon tea for library trustees, principals, teachers and friends; and to publish a library newsletter.
- The DeKalb County Public Library in Georgia reaches latchkey children through letters sent to parents regarding youngsters left unattended at their branches. The library provides the Bruce Street and Tobie Grant Homework Libraries, which include typewriters, computers, read-along books, and learning games (Dekalb County Public Library, 1990).
- Grandparents and Books (GAB), initiated at the Los Angeles Public Library, links older adult volunteers with children who have no one to care for them after school. (Los Angeles Public Library, 1990). At the Charles E. Washington branch of the Omaha Public Library in Nebraska, unattended children meet with the 4-H Club once a week, and are assisted by older citizens from the local Retired Senior Volunteer Program in making cookies, painting t-shirts, and other craft projects.
- GASP (Great After School Program) at the Rolling Meadows Library in Illinois is a cooperative effort with the local school district in which children, many of whom speak English as a second language, are transported by school bus after school to the library for refreshments, a film, a craft activity, or a booktalk.
- Latchkey children learn survival skills (fire and traffic safety, conduct with strangers, food preparation, etc.) through the Project Home Safe program, presented by a certified home economist at the Hillcrest Heights Branch of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System in Maryland.

PS 020401

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Perhaps the most carefully planned and exemplary program for latchkey children is SPLASH, Seattle's After School Happenings, which is in place at four branches of the Seattle Public Library and, at this time, is financed by city funds. At each site the activities, ranging from making doll house furniture and maintaining the library's flower beds, to storytimes, sing-alongs and homework, are tailored to meet the needs of the particular community served. Three of the ten goals of SPLASH are to promote reading as a life-long activity, to establish services for new Asian immigrants, and to provide activities which will help develop self-esteem, self-worth, and creativity (Seattle Public Library, 1990). Significantly, the Seattle Public Library revised its mission statement and added organizational values, so that the wording of official statements now meshes with the library's recent efforts on behalf of latchkey children (Seattle Public Library, 1989).

Recommendations Regarding Library Latchkey Children

Based on the author's research, the following recommendations are offered for public librarians who wish to provide more effective service to latchkey children:

1. Interact with representatives from community agencies to develop alternatives concerning latchkey children.

2. Learn about latchkey children in library school and by attending in-service training.

3. Develop and publicize positively worded written policies and procedures for dealing with latchkey children.

4. Conduct research about library latchkey children in public library settings. For example, interview latchkey children to learn which activities they prefer libraries to provide for them. Then implement and evaluate those recommendations.

5. Consider library latchkey children as providing an opportunity to work cooperatively with the community, to turn a captive audience into program potential, and to recruit future library users who enjoy books.

6. Create a separate area where children involved in after-school activities will not disturb other patrons.

7. Use the mission statement as a guide to determining the library's appropriate role in serving latchkey children.

9. Use volunteers, and designate, if possible, a librarian to be solely responsible for after-school programs.

10. Provide arts and crafts supplies, learning games, and a wide selection of books for children to use independently.

This ERIC digest was adapted from the book, *Latchkey Children in the Library and Community: Issues, Strategies, and Programs*, written by Frances Smardo Dowd and copyrighted and published in 1991 by Oryx Press, 4041 North Central at Indian School Road, Phoenix, Arizona, 85012 (1-800-279-ORYX). Addresses and phone numbers for each of the libraries discussed above can be found in *Latchkey Children in the Library and Community*.

Reader's Note: A national opinion poll on library issues, conducted in 1991 by the Library Research Center of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, found that 39% of the 1181 adults sampled felt that all libraries should provide after-school care for children of working parents. A total of 29% felt that such care was useful but not always necessary, and 29% felt that libraries should definitely not provide the service.

More information about the latchkey child in the library can be obtained from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, Syracuse University, 030 Huntington Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244-2340; 315-443-3640.

For More Information

American Library Association (ALA). *ALA Yearbook*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1989.

Budziszewski, M. "Latchkey Children in the Public Library Now Common." *Feliciter* (July/August, 1990): 2.

DeKalb County Public Library. *Dear Parent* form letter and brochures. Decatur, Georgia, 1990.

Dowd, Frances Smardo. *Latchkey Children in the Library and Community: Issues, Strategies, and Programs*. Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx Press, 1991.

Feldman, Sari. "The Library and the Latchkey." Syracuse, New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, 1990. ERIC Digest no. EDO-IR-90-8.

Los Angeles Public Library. *Report on Grandparents and Books*. Los Angeles, California, 1990.

Seattle Public Library. *Mission, Goals, and Organizational Values*. Seattle, Washington, 1989.

Seattle Public Library. *S.P.L.A.S.H.* flyer. Seattle, Washington, 1990.

This publication was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. OERI 88-062012. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.